Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 21 Number 11 November 2024

FIELD TRIP: Sunday, November 17, 2024, 6.30AM: Manjeera WLS & Reservoir. Meeting Point(s): IKEA, Madhapur, 05:00AM; Allwyn Cross Roads Foot Overbridge, 05:15AM; BHEL Bus Stop, 05:30AM; Taj Dhaba, Muthangi, 05:45AM. Trip Coordinator(s): Sathwik Reddy (Mobile: 99858-07186)

Manjeera WLS and Reservoir is a man-made reservoir that provides drinking water to Hyderabad and Secunderabad. It has nine small islands that host a variety of habitats and species. The sanctuary is home to more than 70 species of birds, including large flocks of Common Teal, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Painted Stork, Eurasian Coot, Black-crowned Night Heron, and many more. Manjeera Dam and surrounding fields are good viewing points for finches, wagtails, ibises, munias and more. Look out also for Watercock, Red-necked Phalarope, Bluethroat, Small Minivet, Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Rain Quail, Jungle Bush Quail, Rock Bush Quail, Barred Buttonquail, Painted Francolin, Baya Weaver, Black-breasted Weaver, Tricoloured Munia, Black-headed Bunting, Red-headed Bunting etc.

FIELD TRIP: Sunday, December 01, 2024, 6.30AM: Ananthagiri Hills, Vikarabad. Meeting Point(s): NMDC Main Gate, Mehdipatnam, 05:20AM; Telangana State Police Academy, Chilkur Balaji Temple Road, 05:40AM. Trip Coordinator(s): Sathwik Reddy (Mobile: 99858-07186).

Ananthagiri Hills is a picturesque and ecologically rich area known for its diverse flora, fauna, and scenic landscapes. Situated near Vikarabad, the Ananthagiri Hills forest area forms part of a larger bio-geographically significant region that includes the Nallamala Hills and other parts of the Eastern Ghats. The Ananthagiri Hills forest has a mix of tropical dry deciduous and semi-evergreen forests. The varied landscape, with rolling hills, deep valleys, grasslands and fast-flowing streams, provides a perfect habitat for a wide range of wildlife. Home to a vast array of plant species, including tropical trees such as teak, bamboo, tamarind, *neem*, and *mahua*, along with medicinal plants, shrubs, and flowering plants, the area is also rich in various species of ferns and orchids. The forest is a biodiversity hotspot, particularly known for its vibrant birdlife; a wide variety of bird species, including flycatchers, warblers and woodpeckers, are frequently observed in the area. Many common woodland birds along with migratory birds also visit the region during the cooler months, further adding to its avian diversity. Ananthagiri Hills has a rich bird list of more than 260 species (as per eBird).

Both trips will be half-day trips, so carry adequate water and breakfast/snacks, and protective gear if required. Covid protocols will be followed; please ensure you wear masks, carry a sanitiser and maintain social distancing. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. New Deccan Birders hats and caps will be available for purchase; please carry adequate cash.

Trip Report: Yenkathala Grasslands, October 20, 2024

Gokul Krishna Addanki

The October field trip to Yenkathala on October 20, 2024, organized by Deccan Birders and coordinated by me, aimed to enjoy Yenkathala's lush greenery before the landscape changes later in the season.

The group of 10 participants had arrived around 6:30AM, intending to explore the mixed forest of shrubs, grasslands, and the nearby lake. But a routine birdwatching trip turned into an extraordinary experience when my son, 10-year-old Abhinav Krishna Addanki, made a remarkable discovery during the field trip. Abhinav spotted a rare Pied Harrier, much to the delight of the group, as they explored the rich biodiversity of Yenkathala.

Pied Harrier (Photo: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

The area is known for its diverse bird species, including Harriers, Eagles, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, and various quails. On this day, too, more than 60 bird species were seen – it was a very productive day.

Yellow-eyed Babbler (Photo: Mohd Adnan Uddin)

White-eyed Buzzard (Photo: Abhishek Shroti)

As the group prepared to leave at around 10:00AM, they were excited to spot a Common Kestrel soaring through the sky. Just as they were about to drive off, young Abhinav, keenly observing from the back seat, peered out of the car window and shouted, "Raptor!"

"At first, we couldn't tell what he had spotted, but when we saw the bird and adjusted our camera settings, the black-and-white plumage became clear," said one of the participants. Despite the cloudy conditions, the group soon confirmed the sighting as a Pied Harrier, a rare raptor not commonly seen in the region. Cheers erupted, and high-fives were exchanged as everyone marvelled at the young birder's find.

Abhinav, a passionate birdwatcher for over three years, has already logged nearly 300 species on his personal list, an impressive feat for someone his age. His ability to observe, identify, and remember bird species is nothing short of remarkable.

Yellow-crowned Woodpecker (Photo: Abhishek Shroti)

The Yenkathala region, where the trip took place, is a haven for birders. Its unique landscape supports a variety of bird species, making it a popular spot for birdwatching. In addition to the Pied Harrier, birders can expect to spot species like the Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Painted Francolin, and the Baya Weaver.

Abhinav's sighting of the Pied Harrier was the highlight of the trip, earning him the admiration of the group – and a promise of ice cream as a reward for his sharp eyes!

Indian Peafowl (Photo: Abhishek Shroti)

The list of birds seen during the trip:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Northern Pintail	*Anas acuta*	8	Spotted Dove	*Spilopelia chinensis*
2	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	9	Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*
3	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*	10	Jacobin Cuckoo	*Clamator jacobinus*
4	Painted Francolin	*Francolinus pictus*	11	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*
5	Rain Quail	*Coturnix coromandelica*	12	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*
6	Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)	*Columba livia*	13	Barred Buttonquail	*Turnix suscitator*
7	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	14	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
15	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	39	Indian Bushlark	*Mirafra erythroptera*
16	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	40	Oriental Skylark	*Alauda gulgula*
17	White-eyed Buzzard	*Butastur teesa*	41	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*
18	Pallid Harrier	*Circus macrourus*	42	Grey-breasted Prinia	*Corvus splendens*
19	Pied Harrier	*Circus melanoleucos*	43	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
20	Montagu's Harrier	*Circus pygargus*	44	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*
21	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*	45	Zitting Cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*
22	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*	46	Wire-tailed Swallow	*Hirundo smithii*
23	Eurasian Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*	47	White-browed Bulbul	*Pycnonotus luteolus*
24	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	48	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
25	Asian Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	49	Yellow-eyed Babbler	*Chrysomma sinense*
26	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*	50	Indian White-eye	*Zosterops palpebrosus*
27	Coppersmith Barbet	*Megalaima haemacephala*	51	Large Grey Babbler	*Argya malcolmi*
28	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	*Dendrocopos mahrattensis*	52	Yellow-billed Babbler	*Turdoides affinis*
29	Eurasian Kestrel	*Falco tinnunculus*	53	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
30	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala)*	54	Indian Robin	*Saxicoloides fulicatus*
31	Small Minivet	*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*	55	Siberian Stonechat	*Saxicola maurus*
32	Indian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus kundoo*	56	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*
33	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	57	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
34	White-bellied Drongo	*Dicrurus caerulescens*	58	Baya Weaver	*Ploceus philippinus*
35	Brown Shrike	*Lanius cristatus*	59	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*
36	Bay-backed Shrike	*Lanius vittatus*	60	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*
37	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*	61	Red Avadavat	*Amandava amandava*
38	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	*Eremopterix griseus*	62	Chestnut-shouldered Petronia	*Gymnorris xanthocollis*

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Trip Report: Meghalaya & Kaziranga, April 2024

Text: Shraddha Vyas; Photos: Rishik Modukuru

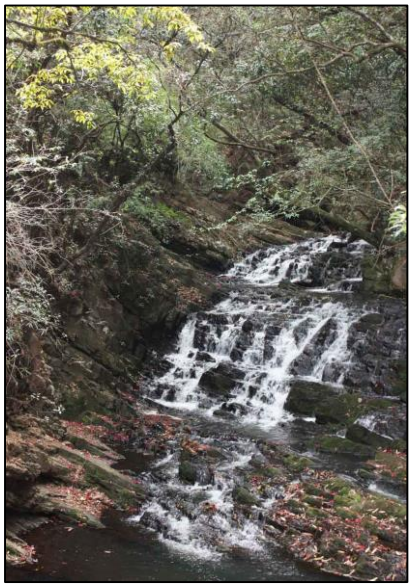
Indian Elephant with calf & Cattle Egret at Kaziranga National Park

The North-eastern parts of India have always fascinated me right from childhood. When in our Social Studies class, we heard the place with highest rainfall was Cherrapunji in Meghalaya, I was very attracted towards it. I used to imagine lush green jungles with moist-moist winds or black cloudy sky with thunderstorms or heavy downpour of rain…… Wondering what all flora and fauna we would find in those regions?

I never thought I would be lucky enough to visit Meghalaya and Assam this summer. But the calling of the North-east was very powerful, I guess, and I couldn't resist the urge.

Along with my sister and 12-year-old nephew Rishik, I planned our trip to first reach Shillong, visit all beautiful locations of Shillong and then proceed to our main destination, Kaziranga National Park.

We loved the mystic cloud-laden hills of Shillong. We literally felt we were driving into the clouds, chilled winds crossing our car, causing shivering in month of April. The thought was thrilling!



Elephant Waterfalls

We visited the famous Elephant Waterfalls, named after the shape of the rock from which the waterfall originated, which resembles an elephant head. We could spot the White-capped Water Redstart dancing at the rocks close to the waterfalls.

We enjoyed the picturesque view of the hill tops while visiting the beautiful clear water river Dawki; we also enjoyed and learnt about the Khasi tribe. My nephew really looked a prince in the Khasi tribal royal costumes!

A view of the Dawki River

Reaching Dawki from Shillong was a lengthy road trip but after reaching the river we felt it was really worth the effort. The clear water of Dawki River was mesmerizing. We could only see mountains all around us, with small and big waterfalls springing up from the mountain crevices slowly falling into the river. There were lots of trees, really dense trees all along the mountains.

The clear waters, the river, the sound of our boat men rowing with the oars, and the melodious chirpings of exotic mountain birds took me into another world – a beautiful world free from urban hustle-bustle, the chaos of daily life, noise, pollution, screens and social media.

I had just left everything behind, immersing, literally soaking my soul into the magical Dawki River, when my thoughts were interrupted by the melodious humming of our boatmen in Khasi language. We didn't know the language but the songs sounded very sweet.

After thoroughly enjoying the magical bliss of Dawki we returned to Shillong. On our way back, we also visited the cleanest village of India, named MAWLYNNONG. It was so beautiful, dripping with its green world charm, huge trees all around, small clean lanes and by-lanes with small cozy houses providing home-stays at reasonable prices. We also had a chance to climb onto a watchtower made of bamboo on a huge jackfruit tree; the view from top was breathtaking.

As the evening moved along, we also visited the world-famous living root bridges of Meghalaya – two of them, a single bridge and also a double bridge named Sohra.

The way the roots were connected to improve the tensile strength of the bridges was amazing. Clear water, rocks, valley full of melodious birds – couldn't make out most of their IDs though, thanks to my eye-sight – it was an unforgettable experience. The serene silence along with birds chirping still soothes me immensely when I think of it.

Next day, while heading towards Assam, we left Meghalaya, literally 'the beautiful state of rainy clouds', with a promise to return to its unexplored beauty once more, soon.

Reaching Assam, we were super excited to enter the beautiful home of the One-horned Rhinoceros – Kaziranga National Park. Our driver mentioned that often the Rhinoceros were seen grazing outside the park too. Just as he spoke, my nephew spotted a rhino grazing calmly across the grassland amidst submerged marshy lake. The driver told us that it generally remains calm but attacks fiercely if disturbed.

We also spotted a Wild Buffalo grazing on Eichhornia (Water hyacinth) in the marsh.

Done with the formalities of check-in at our beautiful Resort Iora, we arranged for our elephant safari the next day early morning and also a jeep safari in the afternoon.

The elephant safari was arranged at the Kohra zone. Early morning fog, bird sounds loud and clear in the misty foggy morning – the forest was so welcoming. We were escorted towards the elephant stand from where, by turns, we climbed onto the elephants. The elephant ride was smooth; swaying through the huge trees, we reached the clear grasslands. The Mahout said that the elephant safari would only take us through the periphery of the jungle, but for deeper forests we would need to take the jeep safari.

Everyone was enjoying the safari ride when I suddenly spotted the beauty of North-east, a large Great Indian Hornbill, flying across the grassland and landing on a high perch of silk cotton tree or *semal* tree. The first sighting of Great Indian Hornbill was unforgettable. Meagre leaves on dry branches of *semal* tree facilitated a clear view of the bird although we missed out on taking a shot.

One-horned Rhinoceros with calf

Our attention was then diverted towards a One-horned Rhinoceros calf feeding from her mother, slightly away from the *Semal* tree, near a river. The sight was very beautiful.

Slowly, steadily enjoying the forest, our elephant ride ended. But we were still excited about the jeep safari in the afternoon. Chances of sighting a Tiger or Wild Elephant were higher in the jeep safari.

In the mid-afternoon, we entered the forest reserve from the West zone. We were thrilled and expected some very good sighting in the forest. The forest was very dense, with huge trees of different varieties, of which I can markedly remember the Silk Cotton Tree. The driver informed that the forest was home to many wild animals like Barking Deer, Hog Deer, Swamp Deer, Wild Boar, Wild Elephant, Tiger and of course One-horned Rhinoceros, and that it was a hub to many migratory birds as well.

Indian Elephants at Kaziranga National Park

As we reached the watchtower, we spotted a large group of wild Elephants enjoying themselves at the river side. We were lucky to spot a small baby elephant feeding from its mother by the river side. There were huge tuskers too in the herd. There were almost 20-25 elephants in the herd, having a great time by the river. As we watched them from the watchtower, we could spot them clearly – otherwise, the elephants are easily hidden in the large elephant grass characteristically found at Kaziranga.

We also spotted a large number of water birds at the river side, like White-breasted and Pied Kingfishers, Greater and Lesser Adjutants making noise in large numbers, Black-necked Stork, Painted Stork, Red-wattled Lapwing etc.

After enjoying the elephant sightings, we reached our jeep and proceeded further. We were informed about a Tiger sighting by earlier jeep riders, but we missed it by few minutes. We all were silent and closely listening to the bird sounds, alarm calls if any in the forest, to locate the tiger on its prowl. But it just hid itself perfectly in the dense forest and eluded us.

We also happened to spot the Yellow-footed Green Pigeon – it was pecking at the ground, but as our jeep reached it flew away; we missed its shot!!

The driver showed us the scratches recently made by a tiger on a tree bark; he also told us that jungle is host to a variety of snakes as well.

As we moved further one of the earlier jeep riders showed us a Cinereous Vulture, at its nest on a large silk cotton tree. We rejoiced at the sighting of the vulture, as vultures across the globe are heading towards extinction and their conservation is crucial.

As dusk approached, the forest became all the more beautiful. Lush green dense forest with lakes and rivers here and there, huge elephant grass and small wooden bridges across the lakes was mesmerizing me with its magical charm. We crossed a huge river, a tributary of the Brahmaputra, while returning towards the exit – it had some huge noisy flocks of migratory birds, which my nephew identified as Spot-billed Pelicans.

A large flock of Spot-billed Pelicans

Red-wattled Lapwing

Foxtail Orchid (*Rhynchostylis retusa*)

Besides the charm of the jungle, Kaziranga also provides interesting tourist attractions. We made a visit to the Orchid Garden, which was so beautiful and filled with fragrance from around 8000 species of Orchids. Most of the orchids across India are transported from Assam. Fragrant orchids with vibrant colors, unique shapes and sizes were breath-taking.

Hooker's Pitcher Plant (Nepenthes X Hookeriana)

A visit to the tribal village, tribal museum, looking at their art and handicrafts and world-famous cultural events, is mandatory. The people of Assam are simple and sweet, they sing melodiously and dance beautifully, and are very well versed with different musical instruments.

We listened to their sweet songs sung by world famous artists and thoroughly enjoyed watching the Butterfly Dance and of course most famous Bihu dance.

We really had many golden memories to take back with us at the end of this wonderful journey.

The list of birds seen is given below:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	White-capped Water Redstart	*Phoenicurus leucocephalus*	8	Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*
2	Great Indian Hornbill	*Buceros bicornis*	9	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*
3	White-breasted Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	10	Cinereous Vulture	*Aegypius monachus*
4	Pied Kingfisher	*Ceryle rudis*	11	Black-hooded Oriole	*Oriolus xanthornus*
5	Greater Adjutant	*Leptoptilos dubius*	12	Spot-billed Pelican	*Pelecanus philippensis*
6	Lesser Adjutant	*Leptoptilos javanicus*	13	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	*Treron phoenicoptera*
7	Black-necked Stork	*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*			

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Malabar Grey Hornbill (*Ocyceros griseus*)

Malabar Grey Hornbill (Dandeli, Karnataka, October 30, 2024)

Order:	Bucerotiformes
Family:	Bucerotidae
Genus:	*Ocyceros*
Species:	*O. griseus*
Size:	45-58 cm

Description & distribution: The Malabar Grey Hornbill is endemic to the Western Ghats and associated hills in Southern India. A large bird, it is still smaller than the rest of the Asian hornbills. It has an overall grey appearance, with the upperparts being a darker grey than the underparts, which have whitish streaks. The tail is long and blackish with a white tip, and the vent is cinnamon. The head is grey with a broad white superciliary band going down all the way to the neck, broadening behind the eye and contrasting with the darker ear-coverts. The bill is big but lacks a casque that other hornbills have. The sexes are alike, except that male birds have a reddish bill with yellow tip, while female birds have a plain yellow bill with black at the base of the lower mandible and along the culmen. Wings are brownish-grey, and shows a white carpal patch and black primary flight feathers tipped with white. Juvenile birds show browner upperparts, a yellow bill and dull white or yellow irises.

Habitat & behaviour: The Malabar Grey Hornbill is usually seen in pairs or small groups, feeding on figs and other forest fruits. It is a large and noisy inhabitant of dense forests or rubber, arecanut and coffee plantations. Flight is heavy and ponderous, with a strong flap-and-glide pattern; while on the tree also, it hops around heavily on the thicker branches of fruiting trees. It emits loud, hysterical cackling, laughing and screeching calls, and is easy to trace and identify through the calls. Being a large frugivore, it is an important seed dispersal agent for many species of fruit bearing forest trees. It also feeds on small vertebrates and, in captivity, will readily take meat.

Nesting: The Malabar Grey Hornbill breeds mainly between January and May. It is a secondary cavity nester, being incapable of digging its own nest, and hence nests in large cavities in trees. It is monogamous, and a pair may use the same nest for several years. Like other hornbills, the female incarcerates herself within the cavity, closing the entrance with a cement made from her droppings, leaving a narrow opening through which the female disposes of excreta, and receives food from the male. The male is responsible for bringing adequate food for the female and the young; the food includes berries, insects, small rodents and reptiles. Males tap the tree to indicate to the female that they have arrived with food, then pass the food through the nest opening. Berries are regurgitated one at a time and passed to the female, while other food may be passed directly. The usual clutch consists of three or sometimes four white eggs, after laying which, the female begins a complete moult of her flight feathers.

Local name: The Malabar Grey Hornbill is known as *'Saraattaan'* in Kadar and *'Seriyan oongal',* meaning 'small hornbill', in Muthuvan respectively (Kadar and Muthuvan being Dravidian tribal languages). It is called *'Solai kaka'* in Tamil, *'Kaldal hakki'* in Kannada, *'Kozhi vezhambal'* in Malayalam, *'Gobre vayare'* in Konkani and *'Chhota peelu'* or *'Dhanesh'* in Marathi.

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